

Little Girl Lost by Keitorin Asthore

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Summary: Joyce and Hopper were so concerned about saving one child that they didn't realize they were sacrificing another until it was too late. Based on episodes seven and eight. Oneshot.

Little Girl Lost

Disclaimer: Stranger Things belongs to the Duffer Brothers and Netflix, not me. This whole thing was written on my phone so the typos are probably mine.

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"Let's go!"

The kids scrambled out of the bus and he counted heads- Mike Wheeler, Lucas, the Henderson boy. He paused. The girl. The girl with the shaved head that was there in the diner when Benny was shot. The little girl that broke a boy's arm with her mind.

She didn't look like she was capable of hurting a fly. She was just a little thing in a pink dress and a boy's jacket that was too big for her and swallowed up her hands. Her brown eyes were wide and frightened like a startled fawn's, and a purple bruise darkened her pale forehead above her left eye.

"Come on, kid," he said impatiently as she froze in the middle of the aisle. "Before they come to. We gotta go."

She stared at the body at the foot of the steps, then the tarnished metal badge on his shirt. Her panic was tangible and he could see her shoulders heaving. "I'm one of the good guys, I promise," he said, gentling his voice. He held out his hands. "C'mon, kiddo. We're gonna get you someplace safe."

She hesitated for a split second before taking his hands and allowing him to pick her up and set her on the ground. He gave her the slightest push forward and broke into a run towards the car.

The boys were already in the cruiser, Lucas in the front and Mike and Dustin in the back. Eleven started to lag behind, her steps uneven and unsteady. "Elle! Elle!" Mike screamed. She ran faster, Hopper herding her forward, until she tripped on her shoelaces and fell into the car. Mike pulled her inside, Dustin slammed the door, and Hopper jumped in the front seat and peeled out.

"Everybody okay?" he said. "Everybody in one piece?"

"I scraped my hand," Dustin said, looking down at his fingers.

"You're fine," Lucas scoffed.

Hopper glanced back at the girl. She was sandwiched between Mike and Dustin, still staring blankly ahead, her chest heaving. "Eleven, are you okay?" he asked.

She nodded, eyes glazed over. Her nose had started to bleed and she didn't seem to notice. Hopper fumbled in his pocket and tossed his handkerchief back to her. "Your nose is bleeding," he informed her, and with shaking fingers she covered her face.

"That happens to her sometimes," Mike informed him. He had his arm around the girl's shoulders. "Elle, are you okay?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"So are you going to tell us what the hell is going on?" Lucas demanded impatiently.

Hopper filled them in- Jonathan and and Nancy at the station, Troy and his mother coming in to file the report, the helicopters circling the Wheeler house. The kids fell silent.

"What do we do now?" Dustin asked in a small voice.

"We fight the demogorgon and we find Will in the upside down," Mike said confidently.

"The upside...you know what? Let's wait for the explanation when we've got everybody in the same place," Hopper said. "Everybody just...shut up and let me drive."

The kids obeyed. He took back roads to the Byers' place, navigating by memory as the sun began set. The kids were quiet, and he heard Dustin start to snore. In the rearview mirror Hopper watched Mike take Eleven's hand and squeeze it tight. Puppy love, from the looks of it. These kids were too young for anything serious. Hell, Jonathan and Nancy were too young for anything serious.

He conveniently pushed away the memories of his own high school sweetheart and how they were so sure they'd end up together as he pulled up to her driveway, headlights blaring into the windows. Lucas twisted around and bopped Dustin on the kneecap; Mike and Eleven dropped hands. "Wake up, we're back," he said.

"You didn't have to hit me," Dustin complained.

Joyce ran out of the house, Jonathan and Nancy at her heels. Hopper got out of the truck and slammed the door. "Mike!" Nancy called, dodging past and grabbing her little brother in a tight hug. "Oh my god, Mike, I was so worried about you."

Mike hugged his sister stiffly, clearly conscious of his friends watching him. "Yeah, uh...me too," he said.

Nancy pulled back and frowned. "Is that my dress?" she said.

Hopper glanced down. Eleven froze in front of him, eyes wide. "Um," Mike said. "Yeah. We got it from the basement."

"Yeah, we couldn't keep dressing her in Mike's sweatpants and shit," Dustin added helpfully.

Eleven bit her lip and took a step back, bumping into Hopper. He wrapped an arm around her narrow shoulders and she jumped in shock. "Let's get the kids inside and then give them the third degree, okay?" he said.

The kids trooped inside the house, chattering loudly, each trying to be heard over the other, but Eleven didn't move. Hopper squeezed her shoulder. "You okay, kid?" he asked.

She nodded, but when she took a step her knees buckled. Hopper swept her up before she could hit the ground. "Okay, okay," he said. "You're all right."

She was still shaking, looking back over her shoulder. "Not safe," she whispered. Her thin fingers tangled in the collar of his shirt. "Scared."

"You're safe for right now," he said. "We're gonna take care of you, okay?" She hesitated, then nodded. He shifted her in his arms and

carried her up the steps, going all the way inside the house and closing the front door before he set her down on her feet.

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Joyce hadn't been sure of what to expect, but it hasn't been this. Not a skinny girl with big brown eyes and a mouth trembling like she was on the verge of tears. Her pink dress was too thin for the cold November wind and one of her socks had fallen down to her ankle. She stood in the middle of the living room, blinking, silent as the other kids bickered and shouted to be heard over each other. Hopper was trying to get to them to calm down, rubbing his temples in exasperation.

Joyce edged a little closer to the child, close enough to catch her attention. Eleven whipped her head around, startled. "Hi, sweetie," Joyce said hastily. "I didn't mean to scare you."

She didn't answer.

"Your name's Eleven?" Joyce asked. "That's...unusual."

She nodded and pushed up the dirty sleeve of her dress. Etched in her pale skin were three numbers. "Eleven," she repeated, and she pointed to herself.

Joyce touched her fingertip lightly to her soft skin. It was an old tattoo, faded around the edges. She had the sudden, horrible image in her mind of a toddler screaming bloody murder as adults held her down with no mercy, scratching the lines into her skin. It was so vivid- the sound of the baby screaming, the image of the white room and the stone faced doctors- that she wondered briefly if Eleven was giving her the memory herself.

"Okay, okay, everybody just calm down!" Hopper bellowed. The boys and the two teenagers immediately shut up, but Eleven flinched. "We need to get this straightened out. We gotta start at the beginning."

Dustin took a deep breath, but Joyce interrupted him. "When's the last time you kids had anything to eat?" she asked.

"Lunch," Lucas said flatly. The boys nodded, and Jonathan and Nancy

just looked at each other and shrugged.

"I think we should feed the kids, and then figure everything out," Joyce said. Dustin visibly brightened. "There's stuff in the kitchen for sandwiches."

"I'll take care of it," Jonathan said.

"I'll help," Nancy added. Jonathan glanced back at her, looking both sheepish and grateful.

Mike glanced over at Eleven. "You okay?" he asked. She nodded.

Joyce beckoned all four kids over to the coffee table in the living room and they dropped to sit around it. Eleven knelt carefully, hands clasped in her lap, listening. Joyce resisted the urge to worry at her, to fix the collar of her dress and smooth her short hair. Will and Jonathan were used to her habits, but she had a feeling Eleven wouldn't quite react the same.

Jonathan and Nancy came out with their arms laden down and the boys pounced on them, shouting to each other as they piled food on their plates. Joyce wanted to cry. She had never heard the boys' voices echoing in her voice without Will chiming in, and her chest ached.

Eleven sat still, watching, bewildered. Mike was distracted, and without him she seemed untethered, unsure of what behavior she should be copying. Joyce reached around the kids and started putting a sandwich together- peanut butter on both sides with strawberry jam in the middle, the way Will liked it. He always insisted it kept the bread from getting soggy. She set the plate down in front of Eleven, then went into the kitchen and poured milk into a cup.

"You should eat something," Joyce said softly, setting the cup down. Eleven gazed up at her for a moment, then slowly reached for the sandwich. She took a careful bite, chewed a little, and then tore into it like she was starving.

"Slow down, slow down," Joyce whispered, placing a cautious hand on her shoulder. No one else noticed, but Eleven flinched, dropping

the sandwich on the plate and pressing herself back in the chair. She looked up at Joyce, waiting. It took her a moment to figure out what she was waiting for.

"I'm...I'm not going to take it away from you," she stammered. "Just eat a little more slowly, okay? I don't want you to choke."

After a long pause Eleven picked up the sandwich again, obediently eating more slowly. Joyce watched her, her stomach twisting. How could a child just automatically assume that someone was going to take her food away?

"Okay, so now you can start explaining," Hopper said, pushing his plate away and leaning back in the armchair. "What's this upside down? What's the demogorgon?"

Nancy started gathering up dirty dishes and Joyce sank down on the couch, listening, trying to follow the line of conversation from monsters to a shadow world to the bad men in the white van to fleas and acrobats. Mike scrambled for a notebook and a discarded orange market and scribbled out a diagram.

"Okay, so, in this example, we're the acrobat," he said, holding up his illustration. Will and Barbara, and that monster, they're this flea. And this is the Upside Down, where Will is hiding. Mr. Clarke said the only way to get there is through a rip of time and space."

"A gate," Lucas clarified.

"That we tracked to Hawkins Lab."

"With our compasses," Dustin added. Joyce stared at him. "Okay, so the gate has a really strong electromagnetic field, and that can change the directions of a compass needle."

"Is this gate underground?" Hopper asked.

"Yes," Eleven said. She looked up at him, mouth pressed tight.

"Near a large water tank?" he asked quietly.

"Yes."

"H-how do you know all that?" Dustin asked.

Mike's eyes went wide. "He's seen it," he said in awe.

Eleven stared up at Hopper, her mouth trembling. He met her gaze, silent, but there was something behind his eyes. Sympathy? Joyce couldn't tell.

But she was too distracted to think about that. "Is there any way that you could that you could reach Will?" she pressed. "That you could talk to him in this-"

"The Upside Down," Eleven said in a small voice.

"Upside Down," Joyce echoed.

"Yeah." Eleven nodded.

"And my friend Barbara?" Nancy asked. "Can you find her, too?" Eleven nodded.

Hope surged in Joyce's chest. "How can you do that?" she asked. "What can we do?"

Mike jumped up. "The radio," he said. Lucas grabbed his backpack and rummaged around for it, thrusting the walkie talkie in Mike's hand. "Here, let's get set up."

He zipped off to the kitchen with the radio in hand and turned on the light over the table. "We did this at school," he explained as one by one they followed him. "With Mr. Clarke's radio. We kind of broke it, but we got to talk to Will before that." He pulled a chair out. "Elle, sit here."

She obeyed, taking hold of the armrests like she was afraid she might fall over. Nancy fumbled in her pocket for a taped-together photo and set it down in front of her. "That's Barb," she explained. "So you know who you're looking for."

Eleven nodded solemnly. Dustin switched on the radio, and they all gathered at the other end of the table, waiting. Joyce held her breath. Hopper put his hand on her shoulder, heavy and comforting, and she

squeezed his fingers hard.

Eleven closed her eyes. The radio emitted soft static. Joyce held her breath and even that seemed too loud. She willed herself to hear her son's voice, to pull him through.

The lights blinked overhead and the radio crackled loudly, but it faded fast. Eleven opened her eyes. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

Joyce's heart seized. "What?" she demanded. "What's wrong? What happened?"

Eleven shrank back, making herself smaller. "I can't find them," she said, her voice breaking. Joyce's heart plummeted.

She opened her mouth to press Eleven further but Hopper let go of her hand and stepped towards the girl. "It's okay, kid," he said gently. "You did good." Eleven took a deep shuddery breath, her eyes welling up. Blood started to trickle from her nose. "Go splash some cold water on your face, okay? Give yourself a minute."

Eleven nodded and pulled herself to her feet. She wobbled visibly, her knees buckling, and disappeared down the hall. "Is she gonna be okay?" Hopper asked.

"Whenever she uses her powers, she gets weak," Mike explained. "The more energy she uses, the more tired she gets."

"Like, she flipped the van earlier," Dustin said.

"It was awesome."

"But she's drained."

"Like a bad battery."

"Well, how do we make her better?" Joyce stammered.

"We don't, we just have to wait and try again," Mike said.

"Well, how long?" Nancy asked impatiently.

Mike shrugged. "I don't know."

"The bath."

They all turned around to see Eleven standing in the doorway, pale but eyes too bright. "What?" Joyce asked.

"I can find them," Eleven said. She stopped, swallowed hard. "In the bath."

"What do you mean, like a-

"The water tank," Hopper guessed. "In the basement. Right?"

Eleven nodded. "They put me there," she said. "I could see things. Hear things."

Dustin snapped his fingers. "A sensory deprivation tank," he said. "So you can focus and not get distracted by anything else." Eleven nodded.

Hope began to surge in Joyce's chest again, electrifying her down to her fingertips. "Are you sure?" she asked.

"Yes," Eleven said. "Yes."

"How are we going to build one of those though?" Lucas said. "We can't just sneak into the lab."

"Mr. Clarke will know!" Mike said, and Dustin was already scrambling for the phone. Eleven hovered anxiously, her fingers twitching, and if Joyce had looked a little closer, she would have seen the fear in her eyes. But she was distracted by thoughts of Will, and she didn't notice.

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For a split second Hopper wanted to stop everything. Eleven looked so small, so scared, even with her chin held high and her shoulders rigid. The juxtaposition of her shaved head and panic-stricken expression against her little pink dress was too much. She was just a kid. She didn't need to do this.

But she did. No one else could do what she could. It had to happen.

She clung to his hand on her left and Joyce's on her right, leaning heavily on them to keep from slipping into the water. Hopper held on tight but not too tight; the bird bones of her small fingers threatened to snap in his grip. She lowered herself into the water, the skirt of her dress spreading like flower petals, and laid back, her arms outstretched.

He sat back, watching her in the dim light as electricity surged around them. Most of her face was obscured by the duct taped mask over her eyes. The only sign that she was still with them was the slight rise and fall of her chest.

He'd never heard a school gym so quiet before. The kids huddled together, eyes bouncing from the limp body in the pool to the silent walkie talkie. Beside him Joyce fidgeted anxiously, her fingers tangling and untangling, and he resisted the urge to reach out and squeeze her shoulder.

"Barbara?"

Everyone snapped to attention at Eleven's soft faraway voice. The kids looked at each other, eyes wide. The lights dimmed sharply overhead. "What's going on?" Nancy whispered.

"I don't know!" Mike said.

Nancy leaned over the pool. "Is Barb okay?" she asked. "Is she okay?"

Eleven was quiet. "Gone," she whispered. Nancy covered her mouth, her eyes widening. "Gone, gone, gone..."

She struggled in the water, her breath coming in raspy gasps, and Joyce reached for her hand. "It's okay, it's okay," she soothed.

"Gone!" Eleven wailed, her curled fingers hitting against the water, and without thinking Hopper reached for her other hand. She latched on tightly, her bitten-off fingernails, digging into the back of his hand, and he squeezed back. "Gone, gone!"

She thrashed weakly, ripples rising on the surface, and Joyce slid her

arm under the little girl's shoulders. Eleven wrapped her arm around Joyce's elbow, clinging in desperation. "Hey, it's okay," Joyce said, covering Eleven's hand with hers. "It's okay, we're right here. We're right here, honey."

Hopper closed his eyes. If he wasn't looking, if he wasn't listening closer to the timbre of the voice, he could almost pretend that he was sitting beside Sara again while his wife tried to comfort her.

Eleven choked on a sob and Hopper squeezed her fingers. "I got you," Joyce whispered. "Don't be afraid. I'm right here with you. You're safe. It's okay, honey."

She quieted down slowly, her breaths evening out and her death grip loosening on Hopper's hand. The water stilled around her.

"Castle Byers," she said in a small voice.

Joyce whipped around to look at Jonathan, her hands still holding tightly to Eleven. He stared at her wide eyed. Eleven's lips parted, but it took a moment before she spoke.

"Will," she breathed.

Joyce gasped. "Will?" Shock flickered on the faces of the kids gathered closely around the pool. Eleven went very still. Joyce gripped her hand tighter. "You tell him...you tell him I'm coming. Mom is coming."

Eleven sighed, slow and ragged. Hopper watched the lights flicker over her pale face.

The radio crackled. "Hurry," a tired voice said, and all the kids looked at each in wild hope. Will's voice.

"Okay," Joyce said, leaning over Eleven. "Listen, you tell him to...to stay where he is. We're coming. We're coming, okay? We're coming, honey. Just...just hold on a little longer."

Eleven's shoulders hitched. The radio crackled again, but it wasn't Will this time. Eleven whimpered, the slightest sound, but through the walkie talkie they could hear her sobbing. Chills ran down

Hopper's spine. He almost reached for her but she bolted upright, gasping for breath and wrenching the mask off her face. The kids jumped back in surprise, but Eleven sank back, shaking violently.

Joyce wrapped her arms around her. "Okay, okay," she soothed as Eleven clung to her, her knees tucked up to her chest in the water. "I've got you." Hopper watched Eleven's face crumple and Joyce hugged her tighter. "I got you, honey. You did so good." She pressed a kiss to the side of her head and Eleven began to cry in earnest. "Are you okay?"

The kids glanced away as she sobbed into Joyce's arms. Hopper leaned forward. "Let's get her out of there," he said quietly.

Joyce ran her hand over Eleven's soft short hair. "Honey, are you okay?" she repeated. "Can you answer me? Are you?"

He saw her fingers constrict and his heart stopped beating. "Get her out," he said sharply.

Joyce looked up at him in confusion. "Hopp, what are you?"

"Get her out!" he barked, and Eleven went limp in Joyce's arms, her head lolling drunkenly, and she sank into the water.

"What's wrong with her?" Dustin shrieked.

Eleven started seizing, her thin arms and legs shaking and agitating the water. Joyce stared at her in horror. Hopper reached into the pool and lifted the child out, trying to hold onto her while she shook. "She's having a seizure," he said. Saltwater ran from Eleven's dress onto the floor, pooling beneath her.

"Is she okay? Is she dying?" Mike demanded, his voice rising in panic. Nancy put her hand on his arm.

"She's all right," Hopper said, watching Eleven's pale face. Already the shaking of her small body was beginning to still. He knelt beside her, his fingers resting lightly on the side of her cold neck, and felt her pulse shake under her skin. Her arms and legs stopped twitching and she seemed to collapse into herself, quiet and motionless. Hopper rolled her carefully onto her side, keeping his hand on her back.

"Are you sure she's okay?" Mike asked. Hopper gritted his teeth at how horribly young he sounded.

"She'll be fine," he said. "Give her some space."

He smoothed his hand over her soft shorn head. Her lashes fluttered and she opened her eyes with a sharp gasp, her spine going rigid. "Hey, hey, calm down," he soothed, rubbing her back. "You're all right. You're safe. Lie still."

She struggled to sit upright anyway, swaying dangerously, and Hopper caught her. "Hold on, hold on," he murmured. He wrapped his arms around her to keep her from moving and she sank into his chest.

Joyce approached them cautiously. "Her nose is bleeding," she said. She took a handkerchief out of her jacket pocket and cupped it over Eleven's nose. Hopper rubbed her back until she finally looked up, her big brown eyes wide and shell-shocked.

"All right, honey," Joyce said. "Let's get you warmed up, okay?"

Eleven nodded, raising her cheek from Hopper's shoulder. He held her steady as Joyce helped her into her socks and shoes again, her bare ankles faintly purple with cold. "Here, hold on a second," Hopper said, and he shrugged out of his flannel button up shirt. He guided Eleven's arms through the sleeves, then rolled the cuffs up so her hands weren't covered. She was so pale, her lips gray and her eyes dull and glazed over, and for a moment Hopper wondered if they ought to take her to a hospital.

"We found a blanket," Jonathan said quietly. Joyce shook it out and draped it over the shivering little girl; the blanket was old and dusty but still thick and warm.

"Here, take her over to sit on the bleachers," Hopper said. "Let the boys keep an eye on her."

Jonathan nodded and picked her up carefully. Her thin arms twined around his neck as he carried her over. Mike zipped over to her side immediately, sitting down beside her and letting her lean her head on

his shoulder. Dustin and Lucas followed, forming a little knot around the silent little girl. Lucas tugged the blanket tighter around her shoulders and rubbed her upper arm briskly, trying to draw warmth back into her. She stared straight ahead, not seeing anything, her hands limp on her lap. Dustin leaned over and squeezed her knee.

Hopper turned to talk to Joyce and Jonathan, to make plans, to figure out how they were going to rescue Will. If he'd known then that they would save him at the cost of losing Eleven, maybe he would have done something differently. Hugged her goodbye, maybe, given her a memory of kindness to take with her. Told her she was a good girl, a brave girl. At least said goodbye.

But he didn't know, and he left without looking back.

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Will was asleep again. Joyce still held his hand, his thin fingers loose in her grip. She couldn't stop staring at him, marveling at how beautiful and perfect he was. It was just like when he was a newborn baby. Both of her boys, when they were first born, spent their first nights on earth in her arms as she adored their perfect little noses and mouths and furrowed brows.

"Mom, we gotta go," Jonathan whispered. "They're kicking us out. They said we can come back tomorrow for visiting hours."

"But I can't leave him," she whispered back. "I just got him back."

Jonathan squeezed her shoulder and she looked up, seeing for the first time that his eyes were bloodshot and rimmed with dark circles. "He'll be okay," he said.

She stood up and squeezed his upper arms. "Let me just say goodnight, okay?" she said. "And then we'll go home."

She bent over Will, smoothing his hair back from his forehead, and kissed his soft cool cheek. "Goodnight, baby," she murmured in his ear. "I'll be back tomorrow, okay?"

She straightened up and wrapped her arm around Jonathan's as they walked down the hall. He had to be tired too. She'd heard just

enough of what he and Nancy went through in the house- the demogorgon and the bear traps and the fire- and his palm was wrapped in thick gauze. No matter how mature he was for his age, he was still just a kid himself, and he needed her too. Joyce hugged his arm and he smiled in exhausted relief.

The Wheeler kids were the only ones left in the waiting room, both of them pale and silent, staring at the walls. "Where's Dustin and Lucas?" Joyce asked.

"Their parents came to get them," Nancy said. "Chief Hopper and my mom are talking to them. Explaining stuff."

She looked exhausted, her cheek resting heavily on her hand; the other rested limply on her lap, mummified in gauze. Joyce looked around and frowned. "Where's Eleven?"

Nancy bit her lip. Mike stared at the wall. Cold fear rippled down Joyce's spine. "Where's Eleven?" she repeated, her voice rising. "Is she hurt? Is she okay?"

"She's dead!" Mike burst out, and he dropped his face in his hands, breaking into sobs.

Nancy reached for him, her expression softening. "Mike, no," she said. "Hey, it's okay. It's okay."

She pulled him onto her lap like he was no older than Holly. "What do you mean, she's dead?" Joyce demanded, her voice quavering. "They killed her?"

"The bad men came back," Mike choked out. "The Hawkins lab guys. They were going to kill her, they were going to take her-"

Joyce's heart thumped wildly. "Did they?" she said. "Did they take Eleven?"

Her mind ran wild, reminding her of the man in the suit with the warm smile that didn't meet his cold eyes. But Mike shook his head. "She killed them," she said. "With her mind. But she was really weak, and she couldn't walk, and Dustin carried her, and, and we hid, but the monster found us, and-"

His face crumpled, pale and blotchy, and Nancy hugged him tighter. "She sacrificed herself," she said quietly. "To kill the monster."

"But...but she was just a little girl," Joyce said, bewildered. "She was just a child."

Mike cried into his sister's shoulder and Jonathan stared down at his shoes. Joyce's stomach twisted. Her boy was alive, and Eleven was dead.

"Where's...where's her body?" Joyce whispered. At least they could do that. Give her a proper burial.

"There isn't one," Nancy said. "She, um...the boys said she vanished. With the demogorgon."

Joyce covered her mouth with her hand, trying to process everything. The room was silent except for Mike's half muffled sobs, until Karen Wheeler walked in, her shoes clicking on the floor. "Dustin's mom and Lucas's dad came to get them," she said. "And Chief Hopper headed out already, he-" She looked down at her two children. "Oh, Mike, honey. Come here."

She picked him up out of Nancy's arms and he clung to her, even though he was nearly too tall for her to hold. "Joyce, how's Will doing?" she asked.

"Fine," she said. "Better. They're keeping him overnight for observation, but they'll probably send him home tomorrow."

Karen nodded. "Good, I'm glad," she said. She rubbed Mike's back briskly. "I'd better get my kids home." Nancy stood up, pressing close to her mother, and Karen kissed her temple. "Everything's going to be okay now. It's all over. Whatever was happening."

"Karen," Joyce said. "Did...did you ever meet Eleven?"

Karen paused. "No, I didn't," she said. She laughed. "Apparently Mike was hiding her in my basement for the past week like a stray kitten and I never knew."

Joyce couldn't laugh, and Karen's smile faded. "Take care of yourself,

Joyce," she said. "Call me if you need anything."

Joyce nodded numbly and Karen walked her two children out of the waiting room. She couldn't move. Her chest ached.

"Mom, we should go home," Jonathan said, touching her arm lightly, and if he hadn't sounded so tired she probably wouldn't have listened.

"Okay," she whispered. She hugged him suddenly, fierce and tight, and he dropped his face to her shoulder like he was a little boy again. "Okay, honey. Let's go home."

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Author's Notes:

I know I've been a dreadful person and I haven't posted anything in ages, for any fandom. But that doesn't mean I haven't been writing! Usually whenever I have a gangster shift I write on my phone when I'm not currently on stage. I just haven't been posting anything. But I just really fell in love with Stranger Things, and this ended up being decent enough to post, I suppose.

I'm also planning on writing a drabble series about what life is like after they rescue Eleven (because of course they have to rescue Eleven), so if you want you should go to my tumblr (Themetaphorgirl) and leave a prompt. Or just say hello. It would be nice to be on tumblr again!